

# In poor countries, livestock ownership can improve nutritional outcomes but also raise disease risks

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According to a recent systematic review, the relationship between livestock keeping and the health of children under five and women of reproductive age in low- and lower-middle-income countries is complex.

While livestock production can positively influence nutritional status through increased consumption of animal-source foods and other indirect pathways, it can also increase the risk of disease transmission.

The study, which analyzed data from 12 electronic databases and gray literature sources published from 1991 to the end of 2020, found that nearly two out of every five studies reviewed showed that [livestock production](#) is associated with improved height-for-age Z scores and weight-for-length/height Z scores, while close to a third showed improved weight-for-age Z scores. In addition, livestock production showed a positive or neutral relationship with women's [nutritional status](#) in almost all the reported references.

The paper is published in the journal *Nutrition Research Reviews*.

"Livestock production, if accompanied by consumption of livestock-derived foods that are rich in [essential nutrients](#), can improve the nutritional status of children and women in low and middle countries," says Taddese Zerfu, the primary author of the paper and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Research Fellow at the Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Systems, University of Edinburgh, and a visiting researcher at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI).

On the other hand, four-fifths of the references reporting on infection and morbidity outcomes indicated that livestock keeping is linked to a wide range of infectious disease outcomes, which are spread primarily through water, food, and insects.

"These findings strengthen the case for a 'one health' approach to promotion of livestock ownership, in which unintended health consequences for women and [young children](#) are prevented by appropriate household sanitation practices and veterinary care," says Geraldine McNeill, an author of the report and Visiting Professor of

Global Nutrition and Health at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Systems.

In conclusion, the study found that in many low- and lower-middle-income countries, livestock production is associated with better nutritional outcomes but also a higher risk of disease transmission or morbidity among women and children. It is important for policymakers and public health officials to consider both the benefits and risks of [livestock](#) production in their efforts to improve the health and nutrition of these populations.

**More information:** Taddese Alemu Zerfu et al, Associations between livestock keeping, morbidity and nutritional status of children and women in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review, *Nutrition Research Reviews* (2022). [DOI: 10.1017/S0954422422000233](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954422422000233)

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